

Etymologically, the path of no-more-learning is a path that does not require any learning, i.e. any more practice, since it has actualized its fullest potential.

The path of no-more-learning, i.e. the mental consciousness of a Buddha, is both a meditative equipoise path and a subsequent attainment path, for it directly realizes all ultimate truths (the emptiness of all phenomena) as well as all conventional truths.

Yet, even though the five *sense* consciousnesses of a Buddha also realize all phenomena, they are not paths of no-more-learning, for they do not arise chiefly in dependence on meditation.

Please note that the presentation of the obstructions and the five paths in these handouts is chiefly given from the point of view of the Madhyamika Prasangika tenet school. However, these Mahayana paths of seeing and meditation are presented in the context of expounding on the *Ornament* which is traditionally explained from the point of view the Madhyamika Svatantrika. Therefore, in order to become more familiar with the Svatantrika, which differs from the Prasangika in its description of afflictive and cognitive obstructions, emptiness etc., the following is a brief presentation of some of the important views of this philosophical tenet system.

The Madhyamika Svatantrika Tenet School

The views of the Svatantrika can be presented by way of five headings:

1. Afflictive obstructions
2. Cognitive obstructions
3. Elimination of afflictive and cognitive obstructions
4. Emptiness
5. The two truths

Afflictive obstructions

According to the Madhyamika Svatantrika tenet school, the root of Samsara and therefore of afflictions, such as anger, attachment, jealousy, and so forth, is the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. Such ignorance, the other afflictions it induces, and the seeds of both the foregoing are therefore eliminated by the wisdom that directly realizes the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self.

In general, the followers of both Madhyamika tenet systems (Svatantrika and Prasangika), assert that there are two types of selflessness, which are coarser (and therefore easier to understand) than emptiness, i.e. the lack of true existence.

The two types of selflessness are:

1. The lack of a permanent, partless, independent self
2. The lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self

1. The lack of a permanent, partless, independent self

In the time of the Buddha, about 2500 years ago, followers of the different non-Buddhist Indian philosophical systems spent considerable time analyzing and debating the mode of existence of the self. Since most of them accepted past and future lives, they were particularly interested in determining what it is that travels from one life to the next. They understood the ever-changing nature of the five aggregates and needed to posit a self that was more stable than the psycho-physical complex. Hence, many of them asserted the existence of a permanent, partless, independent self. They accepted the existence of a self that was static and unchanging (*permanent*), did not have spatial and temporary parts (*partless*), and existed independently of the five aggregates (*independent*). Such a self could be compared to a pea in a jar, the jar being the psycho-physical aggregates and the pea being the self residing within the aggregates until the aggregates disintegrate at death, at which point the self would go on to its next rebirth.

From a Buddhist point of view, such a self is impossible, for if it really existed, one would be able to find it as an entity separate from mind and body. In addition, a person would never change; he would be completely unaffected by his physical and mental experiences. Therefore, Buddhist tenet holders assert the absence or *lack* of such a permanent, partless, independent self. This constitutes the coarsest type of selflessness.

2. *The lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self*

An understanding of the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self counteracts the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self. This ignorance is subtler than the ignorance which perceives a permanent, partless, independent self (but coarser than the ignorance which perceives true existence).

The mind that apprehends a self-sufficient, substantially existent self does not necessarily perceive the self to exist entirely independently of the five aggregates, but it conceives of the existence of a self to which the mind and body belong, something acting as their owner or governor, having a different character and possessing, controlling, and utilizing them, with the thought, "they are mine". There is also a sense that one's own mind and body could be exchanged for another person's mind and body, i.e. that one's own self could become the owner of another person's psycho-physical aggregates.

From a Buddhist point of view, a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is impossible because an 'owner' of the five aggregates that possesses, controls, and utilizes them cannot be found. Also, it is not possible to detach the self of one person and exchange his mind and body with the mind and body of someone else, for a person's self is characterized by his own mind and body.

Therefore, Buddhist philosophers assert the absence or *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, which is more difficult to realize than the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self, but easier to realize than emptiness (the lack of true existence). The lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self is thus considered to be a subtler type of selflessness than the lack of a permanent, partless, independent self - though emptiness is even subtler.

Unlike the proponents of the Prasangika, the followers of the Svatantrika assert that Hinayana practitioners do not have to realize the *lack* of true existence (i.e. emptiness) in order to overcome afflictive obstructions and attain self-liberation, for they do not accept that the root of Samsara is the ignorance that perceives *true existence*. As explained above, according to them, the root of Samsara is the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self because it induces other afflictions (anger, attachment, etc.) as well as contaminated karma and is thus the main cause of the different types of suffering. Hence, Hinayana practitioners merely have to cultivate the wisdom that directly realizes the *lack* of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, for it serves as a direct antidote to afflictive obstructions.

The followers of the Prasangika, on the other hand, contend that such wisdom is unable to eliminate afflictive obstructions since the root of Samsara and thus of all other afflictions, contaminated karma, and suffering is not the ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self but the ignorance that perceives true existence. Consequently, Hearer and Solitary Realizer practitioners have to cultivate the wisdom that directly realizes emptiness, i.e. the lack of true existence, in order to overcome the obstructions to liberation.

	Root of Samsara	Afflictive obstructions	Direct antidote to afflictive obstructions generated by Hinayana practitioners
Madhyamika Svatantrika	Ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self	Ignorance that perceives a self-sufficient, substantially existent self, other afflictions induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing	Wisdom that directly realizes the lack of a self-sufficient, substantially existent self
Madhyamika Prasangika	Ignorance that perceives true existence (of the self and phenomena other than the self)	Ignorance that perceives true existence (of the self and phenomena other than the self), other afflictions induced by that ignorance, and the seeds of both the foregoing	Wisdom that directly realizes emptiness, i.e. the lack of true existence of all phenomena